1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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the reeds, where their only escape was by swimming the river. In this district, and perhaps elsewhere, Nuer, spurred by hunger, leave camp after the first heavy showers to look for giraffe tracks and pursue these animals relentlessly till they overtake them. This is only possible at the time of the first rains when the animals still have to approach camps to drink while their large hooves stick in the moist earth and slow down their movements. The Nuer, particularly those of the Zeraf river, have a reputation for their courage and skill in hunting elephants, which are surrounded and speared by large parties.

Nuer hunting has thus the same character of simplicity as their fishing. They use little cunning and, except for the spiked-wheel trap, no mechanical devices. This trap is used by immigrant Dinka in most parts of Nuerland and by some of the Lou Nuer, who, nevertheless, regard it as a Dinka contrivance and accordingly tend to despise it, regarding its use as unworthy of men possessing cattle but allowable to poor persons who can thereby obtain meat and even cattle, for giraffe-hair is highly valued for necklaces, such as those which can be seen on Nuer in many plates (especially Plates I and XXVIII(*b*)). Hence one finds a few members of a camp setting traps while the rest abstain. They are set around drinking-pools at the end of the dry season or in the early rains when surface water is still restricted and the ground is not yet moist enough to rot the leather nooses. In 1930 on the Sobat large numbers of giraffe were captured by means of spiked-wheel traps, but it appears to have been an exceptional year. If game-pits are dug at all by Nuer they are very rare and found only on the borders of Dinka tribes, and the burning of stretches of grass that have survived the annual firing in order to spear or club the animals that flee the flames is a very casual practice. In the dry season in Western Nuerland, and probably in other parts, though not on the Sobat, men harpoon hippopotami along the tracks to their nightly grazing grounds. Hippopotamus hunting is not, however, considered a Nuer practice, but a habit of Shilluk and some of the Dinka tribes; and even in those parts where Nuer hunt them it is said to be only men with a few cattle who do so. We may conclude that hunting does not give Nuer much meat and that they do not greatly esteem it as a sport.

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We have not enumerated them, for their names are irrelevant. The fighting between the two peoples has been incessant from time immemorial and seems to have reached a state of equilibrium before European conquest upset it. (Malte-Brun's map compared with modern maps suggests that tribal positions have not greatly altered since 1860.) In the earlier part of the historic period, from about 1840 to near the end of the century, Nuer appear to have been expanding in search of new grazing, but continued raiding for cattle, an aggressive action which we attribute to the structural relations between the two peoples, but which was, no doubt, intensified by rinderpest.

Though Dinka relations with Nuer are extremely hostile and war between them may be called an established institution, they have, nevertheless, united occasionally to make war against the Egyptian Government and there have sometimes been joint social gatherings. In times of famine Dinka have often come to reside in Nuerland and have been readily accepted and incorporated into Nuer tribes. In times of peace, also, Dinka visited their relations who had been captured or who had settled in Nuerland, and, as remarked earlier, there seems in parts to have been some trade between the two peoples. The strands of social relationships of a general kind, which are often numerous across the boundaries of adjacent Nuer tribes and which stretch across Nuerland, are thus prolonged weakly beyond the limits of Nuerland in occasional and hazardous contacts with foreigners.

All Dinka come into the category of *Jaang*, and Nuer feel that category to be nearer to themselves than other categories of foreigners. These foreign peoples, with all of whom the Nuer have reached a state of balanced hostility, an equilibrium of opposition, expressed occasionally in fighting, are, with the exception of the Beir, generally classed as *Bar*, cattleless people or people possessing very few cattle. A further category are the *Jur*, cattleless people whom the Nuer regard as lying on the periphery of their world, such as the Bongo-Mittu group of peoples, the Azande, the Arabs, and ourselves. However, they have separate names for most of these peoples.

We have remarked that Nuer feel Dinka to be nearer to themselves than other foreigners, and in this connexion we draw

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attention to the fact that Nuer show greater hostility towards, and more persistently attack, the Dinka, who are in every respect most akin to themselves, than any other foreign people. This is undoubtedly due, in some degree, to the ease with which they can pillage the vast Dinka herds. It may also, in part, be attributed to the fact that of all neighbouring areas Dinkaland alone opposes no serious oecological handicaps to a pastoral people. But it may be suggested further that the kind of warfare that exists between Nuer and Dinka, taking into consideration also the assimilation of captives and the intermittent social relations between the two peoples between raids, would seem to require recognition of cultural affinity and of like values. War between Dinka and Nuer is not merely a clash of interests, but is also a structural relationship between the two peoples, and such a relationship requires a certain acknowledgement on both sides that each to some extent partakes of the feelings and habits of the other. We are led by this reflection to note that political relations are profoundly influenced by the degree of cultural differentiation that exists between the Nuer and their neighbours. The nearer people are to the Nuer in mode of livelihood, language, and customs, the more intimately the Nuer regard them, the more easily they enter into relations of hostility with them, and the more easily they fuse with them. Cultural differentiation is strongly influenced by oecological divergences, particularly by the degree to which neighbouring peoples are pastoral, which depends on their soils, water-supplies, insect life, and so forth. But it is also to a considerable extent independent of oecological circumstances, being autonomous and historical. The cultural similarity of Dinka and Nuer may be held largely to determine their structural relations; as, also, the relations between the Nuer and other peoples are largely determined by their increasing cultural dissimilarity. The cultural cleavage is least between Nuer and Dinka; it widens between Nuer and the Shilluk-speaking peoples; and is broadest between the Nuer and such folk as the Koma, Burun, and Bongo-Mittu peoples.

Nuer make war against a people who have a culture like their own rather than among themselves or against peoples with cultures very different from their own. The relations between

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contexts means speech, talk, or word, but when used in prayers and invocations in the phrase '*e rwacdu*', 'it is thy word', it means the will of God; and when used in reference to creation it has almost the meaning of the creative word: 'he created the world, it is his word'.

The Nuer can hardly be said to have a creation myth, though our authorities[1] record some fragmentary accounts of the creation of men, parts of which I have myself heard. These state that men were created in the Jagei country of western Nuerland at a certain tamarind tree, at the foot of which offerings, and according to Mr. Jackson sacrifices, were sometimes made till it was destroyed by fire in 1918. Many details in the versions given by Mr. Jackson and Captain Fergusson are clearly foreign, either Dinka or in Mr. Jackson's account Shilluk and in Captain Fergusson's account possibly even Atwot or Mandari, and I regard Father Crazzolara's version as the closest to Nuer tradition. In this version the tamarind tree, called Lic, was itself the mother of men who, according to one account, emerged from a hole at its foot or, according to another account, dropped off its branches like ripe fruits.

Whether they are speaking about events which happened *ne walka*, in the beginning or long ago, or about happenings of yesterday or today, God, creative Spirit, is the final Nuer explanation of everything. When asked how things began or how they have come to be what they are they answer that God made them or that it was his will that they have come to be what they are. The heavens and the earth and the waters on the earth, and the beasts and birds and reptiles and fish were made by him, and he is the author of custom and tradition. The Nuer herd cattle and cultivate millet and spear fish because God gave them these things for their sustenance. He instituted their marriage prohibitions. He gave ritual powers to some men and not to others. He decreed that the Nuer should raid the Dinka and that Europeans should conquer the Nuer. He made one man black and another white (according to one account our white skins are a punishment by God for incest committed by our ancestor with his mother), one man fleet and another slow, one strong and another weak. Everything in nature, in culture, in society, and in men is as it is because

[1] H. C. Jackson, 'The Nuer of the Upper Nile Province', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1923, pp. 70–71; V. H. Fergusson, 'The Nuong Nuer', ibid., 1921, pp. 148–9; J. P. Crazzolara, op. cit., p. 66.

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# CHAPTER VII

## SIN

### I

NUER do not think of the relation of man to God as one of soul, as a separate entity, to Spirit but as one of the whole man to Spirit. The state of the conscience, as we would call it, may be one element in the relation but peace of mind is very much bound up with welfare of body and estate. This is evident from the way they regard the breach of an interdiction which is thought to bring into operation directly, and often almost immediately, spiritual sanctions. We may speak of such a breach as sin.

Sin with the suffering it brings about is central to the study of Nuer religion. If God was thought by Nuer merely to have created man and then to have ceased to interest himself in human affairs there would be no point at all in their paying any attention to him and sacrifice would be a meaningless act. It is because Spirit constantly manifests itself to men and intervenes in their enterprises and affairs that we have the subject of this book, a religion. I draw attention again to the paradox I mentioned in Chapter I, of God being far away in the sky and yet present with men on earth; but we now see that it might better be described as an intuitive understanding of the relation between God and man. God is far removed from man in that man cannot ascend to him. He is very near in that he can descend to man.

Nuer, like other people, want it both ways. They want God to be near at hand, for his presence aids them, and they want him to be far away, for it is dangerous to them. It is particularly dangerous in such situations and relationships as are marked off by religious interdictions.

One of the more important interdictory concepts is that of *thek*, a word we have had occasion to consider earlier in connexion with totems. It has a sense which I translate 'to respect', the word 'respect' being used throughout this book only where Nuer would use *thek*. The word has a similar, but perhaps wider, range of meaning among the Dinka.

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